

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9449
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 0373

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, PINS, PFOR, BC, RH, UK
SUBJECT: RHODESIAN STUDENTS IN BOTSWANA

REF: GABORONE 0354

1. SUMMARY: UK HIGH COMMISSIONER CONFIRMED FEB. 9 THAT MOST OF THE RHODESIAN STUDENTS DID NOT WISH TO RETURN WITH PARENTS. GOB HAD SOME SUSPICIONS THAT SALISBURY-BASED RED CROSS REP DE ROUGEMONT NOT ENTIRELY OBJECTIVE. GOB FEARED "ENTEBBE-TYPE" OPERATION AND HAS ALREADY TRANSPORTED MAJORITY OF STUDENTS TO LUSAKA. HIGH COMMISSIONER CONCERNED THAT RAPID ONWARD MOVEMENT OF STUDENTS COULD CAUSE ADDITIONAL CONTROVERSY IN PARLIAMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. UK HIGH COMMISSIONER ELEANOR EMERY BRIEFED ME FEB. 9 ON THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE 384 STUDENTS FROM RHODESIA WHO CAME TO BOTSWANA ON JAN. 31. DEPUTY HICOM RAFTERY WENT TO THE AREA ALONG WITH CHARLES TIBONE AND DENNIS DE ROUGEMONT, THE RED

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CROSS REPRESENTATIVE, AND WAS IN POSITION TO OBERSVE IN DETAIL (A) THE PROCESS OF INFORMING STUDENT ARRIVALS OF THEIR FREE ACCESS TO ICRC AND UK REPS TO DISCUSS ANY QUESTION (I.E., TO INFORM THEM OF THEIR DESIRE TO RETURN TO RHODESIA), (B) THE CONFRONTATION ON FEB. 6 WITH THE PARENTS OF 250 OF THE STUDENTS WHO ARRIVED FROM RHODESIA BY BUS (REFTEL), AND (C) THE MEETINGS BETWEEN PARENTS AND STUDENTS AND THE SEPARATION OUT AND RETURN TO THEIR PARENTS OF THOSE

GOING BACK TO RHODESIA.

3. MISS EMERY SAID THAT IN RESPONSE TO INVITATION TO RED CROSS REP DE ROUGEMONT TO TALK TO STUDENTS, SOME 24 HAD RESPONDED. ALL 24 TOLD DE ROUGEMONT THEY WANT TO STAY IN BOTSWANA. DE ROUGEMONT FOUND THE PROCEDURE SO MONOTONOUS THAT, MIDWAY THROUGH THE DAY, HE SAID HE FELT HE COULD SERVE NO USEFUL PURPOSE BY INTERVIEWING STUDENTS AND DID NOT PURSUE HIS EFFORTS. DEPUTY UK HICOM Raftery WAS APPROACHED BY FOUR RHODESIAN BOYS, AGES RANGING FROM 21 TO 15. AFTER A FEW MINUTES DISCUSSION, ONE OF THEM, THE 15-YEAR OLD, STARTED SOBBING AND ASKED TO RETURN TO RHODESIA. THE ARRIVAL OF THE PARENTS LED TO MEETINGS BETWEEN THEM AND THEIR CHILDREN THOUGHOUT THE DAY FEB. 6. AS REPORTED REFTEL, A TOTAL OF 51, INCLUDING THE 15-YEAR OLD, OPTED TO RETURN WITH PARENTS TO RHODESIA. LATER THE SAME DAY, TWO YOUNG GIRLS FROM RHODESIA APPROACHED Raftery AND ASKED TO JOIN THE GROUP OF RETURNEES. THEY WERE PUT INTO POLICE HANDS AND LATER TURNED OVER TO THOSE IN CHARGE OF RHODESIAN BUSES.

4. INCIDENTALLY, RED CROSS REP DE ROUGEMONT, WHO IS BASED IN SALISBURY, SAID THE LUSAKA REP SHOULD HAVE REPRESENTED THE RED CROSS BUT WOOTH OTHERWISE OCCUPIED. TWO OTHER RED CROSS REPS WERE SENT IN FOR THE PURPOSE OF "ASSITING" IN INTERVIEWING STUDENTS BUT, BECAUSE OF TREATMENT DE ROUGEMONT RECEIVED, HAD NOTHING TO DO. (DE ROUGEMONT TRIED TO MAKE AN ADDITIONAL APPEAL TO ASSEMBLED STUDENTS AND WAS HOOTED DOWN AND FORCED TO LEAVE THE ROOM. TIBONE, THE PRESIDENCY REP, TOLD ME THAT HE BELIEVED THE SMITH REGIME WAS CLEARLY INVOLVED IN THE DECISION TO SEND SALISBURY-BASED RED CROSS REP. TIBONE IMPLIED THAT DE ROUGEMONT

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WAS NOT ENTIRELY OBJECTIVE).

5. ONWARD MOVEMENT. ACCORDING TO MISS EMERY, THE GOB HANDLED THE ENTIRE AFFAIR WITH GREAT SENSITIVITY AND CONSIDERATION FOR HUMAN EMOTIONS OF ALL CONCERNED. UNFORTURNATELY, THE CAMP IN FRANCISTOWN WHERE THE STUDENTS WERE HELD (LOCATED BETWEEN A PRISON AND A PMU CAMP) WAS IN DEPLORABLE STATE, PARTLY BECAUSE OF HEAVY RAINS. SANITARY CONDITIONS WERE PARTICULARLY BAD AND FOOD WAS MINIMAL, CONSISTING OF CORNMEAL (MEALIES) AND SOME TINNED FISH.

6. UK HICOM ALSO NOTED THAT GOB OPERATED UNDER CONSTANT THREAT OF AN "ENTEbbe-LIKE OPERATION" WHICH THEY FEARED MIGHT OCCUR AT ANY MOMENT. NOT SURPRISINGLY, UK HICOM HAS REPORTS THAT 100 OF THE STUDENTS LEFT FEB. 8. FOR LUSAKA; THE REAMINDER ARE RUMTRED TO BE HEADED FOR LUSAKA FEB. 9. (NOTE: CHARLES TIBONE CONFIRMED FEB. 10 THAT THE "MAJORITY" OF THE STUDENTS HAD ALREADY MOVED ON.) THE HASTE WITH WHICH THEY ARE BEING MOVED CAN BE EXPLAINED BY CONCERN FOR A "RESCUE OPERATION" FROM RHODESIA. HOWEVER, MISS EMERY IS SOMEWHAT APPREHENSIVE ABOUT

HOW NEWS OF CHILDREN'S RAPID ONWARD MOVEMENT TO LUSAKA WILL BE RECEIVED IN BRITAIN, AND PARTICULARLY IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS IF, AS EXPECTED, PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS ARISE AGAIN IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

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Message Attributes

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